



Anticipation, anticipation

Is making me late

Is keeping me waiting

And stay right here, 'cause these are the good old days.

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Carly Simon's song *Anticipation* was a major song hit in 1973. Some may know it as the background song to a Heinz ketchup commercial as it comes out of the bottle every so slowly onto a juicy hamburger. I found out the song is about Simon waiting to meet her boyfriend. I thought of this song as we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent. We call this Sunday *Gaudate Sunday* which is the Latin word for *Rejoice*. We light the pink candle on the Advent Wreath and the celebrant unhappily walks around in pink vestments that he will try to tell you are rose colored. To make matters worse, parishioners will tell him the looks good in them.

Anticipation. That is an emotion that is very strong these days in little children as they ask their Mom *how many days till Christmas. I just can't wait.* How about you. Are you looking forward to Christmas Day? What is the highlight for you on this day? I very much enjoy Christmas Eve and Day here at St. Martins. After all, I am blessed enough to have my guaranteed parking spot. I love walking into our church at 3:30 pm, a half hour before the four o'clock Mass and seeing the church almost full, with the announcement soon being made that since the church is full, there is another Mass in the auditorium. I see the little ones in their Christmas outfits and there is great sense of joy in the congregation. There are many at all our Christmas Masses and it is a delight to be a priest and to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ to them.

I am look forward to going home to family on Christmas Day. The North Carolina wing of my family is present, and I haven't seen them since the summer. I love watching the younger ones in my family playing with their toys, although I do dread the words, *Uncle Pat, can you help us figure out how to put this toy together.* I always make a calendar for each member of the family that features pictures from the last year of all of us at various times. A picture of my splashing into the Dunk Tank at our parish block party made the calendar this year. As I hand them out there are lots of smiles and some good-natured complaints that there are more pictures of some than others. My artistic talent is never completely appreciated. We soon sit down to great festive Turkey dinners.

I will confess that as much as I look forward to Christmas and all its spiritual and family moments, I always get a little bit of the Christmas blues as the day comes to an end. I cannot help but think how fast it goes. I also cannot help but think of Christmases past and who is no longer at the table. January with its cold and snow looms.

Anticipation. For thousands of years, the world awaited the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, as prophesied in the Old Testament. We heard the anticipation for the Messiah in these words: from the Prophet Isaiah:

*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,
to heal the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives
and release to the prisoners,
to announce a year of favor from the LORD
and a day of vindication by our God*

Today's Gospel echoes similar words with the arrival of John the Baptist to herald the coming of the Messiah. When asked if he is the one that we have been waiting for, John responds:

**"I baptize with water;
but there is one among you whom you do not recognize,
the one who is coming after me,
whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."**

As I ponder the preparation that God made in anticipation of God taking flesh as a man like us in all things but sin, I cannot help but think how many people, despite their waiting, failed to recognize Him when he came, and beyond that, rejected him, nailing him to a cross. We spend a great deal of our lives in anticipation: I can't wait until I graduate, to get a new car, for grandchildren, for a different job, for retirement, for the wedding, for better health. It is only normal to look forward to such moments and they can bring great joy. That brings me back to Carly Simon's song. As much as she is looking forward to what her relationship with her boyfriend will be, she sings:

***These are the good old days.
These are the good old days.***

She is telling herself not to miss the present, the now, as she looks forward to the future. These are the good old days. In traditional Catholic spirituality, we talk about the sacrament of the present moment. Here is how one author described it:

Relax. There is no rush here. Not now. You hold eternity in your palm. To pay attention and be fully present in each moment is to meet eternity. For each moment offers in its endless treasures all you will ever need for that moment. Some call this the sacrament of the present moment, or being present. Others call it mindfulness. Jesus called this quality of trust-filled awareness the kingdom of God.

We are not waiting for Jesus to come this Christmas Eve. He was with you when you went to bed and as you awoke. He was with you as you sipped your coffee and glanced at the morning paper. He is with you and will be a very profound way in few moments as we receive His body and blood in the Eucharist. Jesus is ***Emmanuel: a name which means God with us.*** God is with us always. Give us hearts of Lord to see you. Anticipation